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Poems and Songs of the Cuicapicqueh, Contemporary Nahuatl Poets

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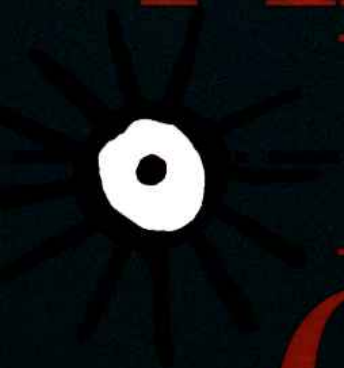
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New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism

Edited by Arnold Krupat

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include a publication of *Okanogan Sweathouse*, Mourning Dove's original, unedited collection of Salish tales; a literary biography on Mourning Dove for *The Western Writers Series*; and a book-length manuscript on the friendship and collaboration between L. V. McWhorter and Mourning Dove.

KATHLEEN A. DANKER is assistant professor of English at South Dakota State University in Brookings, South Dakota. She met Felix White, Sr., while she was employed as a VISTA (NOVA) worker in curriculum development on the Nebraska Winnebago Reservation from 1971 to 1972. In 1978, they published a volume of Winnebago stories for Winnebago youth entitled *The Hollow of Echoes* through the Nebraska curriculum Development Center of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Currently she is working on a volume of transcriptions and translations of Mr. White's oral Trickster narratives.

JAY COURTNEY FIKES completed his doctorate in anthropology at the University of Michigan in 1984 and since then has taught courses in cultural anthropology, policy research, and social science research methods at the United States International University, Marmara University in Istanbul, and New Mexico Highlands University. His new book, *Carlos Castaneda, Academic Opportunism, and the Psychedelic Sixties*, should stimulate debate about authenticity in studies of Native American religions. He is currently researching and writing about Huichol rituals as a postdoctoral fellow at the Smithsonian Institution. He does pro bono work for the Native American Church of North America.

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zalcoatl narrative from the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán* and of the *Leyenda de los soles* manuscript appear in Markmans's *Myths of the Spirit*.

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GEOFFREY KIMBALL is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Anthropology, Tulane University, New Orleans. He has published *Koasati Grammar* and *Koasati Dictionary*, which was written with the support of the National Science Foundation. In addition he has published articles in the *International Journal of American Linguistics* and elsewhere. Currently, with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Kimball is working on a project to edit and translate a collection of Koasati traditional narratives.

MIGUEL LEÓN-PORTILLA is a distinguished scholar of the ancient and modern cultures of Mesoamerica. A professor emeritus at the Institute for Historical Research at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, he is the author of many books, among them *The Broken Spears* and *Aztec Thought and Culture*. He is now Mexico's ambassador to UNESCO in Paris.

KATHERINE MCNAMARA was schooled in the history of ideas at Marywood College and Cornell University, and received a *bourse* from the French government for her research on Marcel Mauss and his theory of magic. In 1976 she left Paris for Alaska. For four years she lived on the frontier and in an Athabaskan village, working as an itinerant poet in the schools. She returned in 1983, remained for several more years, and made her last trip to the North in 1989. She lives now in New York, and is the author of the forthcoming *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, a memoir.

DAVID L. MOORE is now completing a dissertation on contemporary Native American literature at the University of Washington. He taught English at Salish Kootenai College on the Flathead Reservation in Montana through most of the 1980s, after spending much of the previous decade teaching in South Dakota and there studying Indian history, literature, and the Lakota language. He is particularly interested in the pedagogical uses of postcolonial theories of ethnicity for Indian students.

POEMS AND SONGS OF THE CUICAPICQUE, CONTEMPORARY NAHUATL POETS

Miguel León-Portilla

Translated, with notes, by Willard Gingerich

Nothing could better serve as introduction to an initial group of modern poets in the Nahuatl language, ancient but still-living tongue of the Aztecs, than the words Miguel Espinosa Barrios, native teacher of Hueyapan, Morelos, affixed by way of introduction to the first issue of a newspaper which, with Robert Barlow, he began publishing on May 12, 1950. Introducing the distribution of *Mexihcatl Itonalama*, "The Mexican's Newspaper," he announced with obvious pride and a touch of exaggeration that the paper was directed to the "two million indigenous Mexicans who speak this language." We know now that the number of persons who kept this language alive in 1950 was slightly less than a million, while at present (1990) they approach one and a half million.

The significance of the words of Miguel Barrios is the manner in which they anticipate the contemporary renaissance among those who, having Nahuatl as their mother tongue, are now studying its grammar and creating its new literature:

Mexihcatl Itonalama has as its purpose the stimulation of reading and writing in Mexicano [Nahuatl] among the two million Mexican persons who speak Mexicano. To this end it will make use of descriptions of their customs, their traditional fiestas, dances, songs, dramas, and contemporary events—climatological and social. It will also publicize pre-Cortesian customs with the intent of showing that, in spite of the Spanish conquest, there remains an intimate line of relation from the past to the present. It will show that Mexico ought to be Mexico through the Mexicans themselves, since our ancestors gave the name "Mexico" to our country and a coat of arms to the flag that sustains us.

INITIATION OF THE NEW PERSONAL CREATIONS IN NAHUATL

From among all the songs and poems that began to be composed a little before Miguel Barrios would write the paragraph quoted above, and from other more recent productions, a selection is gathered here. Beginning with the identified creators of songs who wrote prior to 1950, I will adduce several poems from the work of the following.

Enrique Villamil (c. 1890–c. 1960) was also a native of Tepoztlán Morelos. He was a jealous guardian of the traditions of his homeland, among them those of the pueblos of Tepoztécatl. He wrote and published various works, some of great lyrical strength. Reproduced below is *Quenin ca in yolli*, "What is Life," and *Caxtilteca in Tenochtitlan huan tlacoltica yohualli*, "The Spaniards in Tenochtitlan and the 'Night of Sadness'."

Pedro Barra y Valenzuela (1894–1978), a native of Chicontepec, Veracruz, cultivated historical investigation and the study of the language as well as literature in Nahuatl. The scarcity of the facts concerning Barra y Valenzuela that have come down to us testify to the low esteem which until recently has been accorded anything relative to the language that was once the *lingua franca* of Anahuac, "the Land by the Seas." He published a book of poems in Nahuatl with Spanish translation, *Nahuaxochmilli*, "Nahua Garden" (México: Editorial Polis, 1939), as well as *The Nahuas, History, Life and Language* (ed. Bartolomé Bruccho, México, 1953). From among his poetic productions I have chosen several of great sensibility which sing the marvels of the native fauna and flora.

Santos Acevedo López y de la Cruz (1903–), a native of Xochimilco, fought in the Mexican revolution and achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel. A descendent of Martín de la Cruz, the Nahua doctor who wrote on prehispanic medicine, he has been the chronicler of Xochimilco and author of a sizeable number of works about the city. He has published a volume of poems entitled *Macehualcuicatl*, "Songs of Common Man" (México: Vargas Rea, 1957). Several of his compositions have also been circulated through *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, v. 15, pp. 237–244.

It bears mentioning that other songs and poems were also circulated by the newspaper, fruit of the creativity of the above-mentioned Miguel Espinosa Barrios, who sometimes used the pseudonym of Miguel Xochipapalotl Atezc atl. Also included in the paper were compositions of Macedonia Mendoza, of Xochimilco, author of brief poems characterized by their subtle irony and occasional veiled erotic overtones; María de Jesús Villanueva, of Tuxpan, Jalisco, who must be considered one of the last literary practitioners in the dialect of that region; Zacarías Sánchez, Leandro García, and other *cuicapicqui* of that fertile town of Tepoztlan; Eloy Alvarez of Cuauhchinanco, Puebla; Eduardo Rosas, of Acalpixca, D.F.; Victoriano Velasco, of Xochimilco; Marciano González, of San Pedro Actopan, D.F.; and Tomás González of Atlahpolco, D.F. As we can see, the number of those who continue cultivating the art of the *cuicatl* in Nahuatl is not as diminished as we might suppose.

A YOUNGER GROUP OF NAHUATL POETS

In more recent times a new flourishing of poetry in Nahuatl has occurred, owing to individuals in different regions of Mexico who, with dialect variations, maintain the life of this language. Among the motivations that impel the authors of this poetic activity to seek self-expression, two in particular stand out. One is to reaffirm the cultural identity itself; the other, to make it possible that living speakers of the language have access to a new literature, one near their own sentiments, concerns, and aspirations as felt by others within that same culture. Another characteristic that these modern forgers of song share is having had some form of academic preparation. Just as some have earned the title of Normal Teacher, others have studied at the National School of Anthropology and History or in the School of Philosophy and Letters of the National Autonomous University, Seminar on Nahuatl Culture, or in one of the provincial universities. It is important to note, however, that in every case we are speaking of individuals whose maternal language is Nahuatl and whose profound concern is to strengthen and extend it.

One such author of an already ample and widely recognized poetic corpus is Natalio Hernández Hernández, born in Ixhuatlán de Madero in the state of Veracruz. Since obtaining his title as normal teacher he has dedicated himself completely to the tasks of education as well as to the cultivation of his native tongue, which is Nahuatl in one of its Veracruz Huastec variants. Gifted with exceptional qualities of leadership, he has been one of the promoters and president of the Organization of Nahua Professionals, *Nechicolistli tlen Nahuallajtonaj Masehuallamachtianij*. Employed in the field of bilingual education under the Secretary of Public Education, he has sponsored the publication of Nahuatl grammars designed specifically for native speakers in a variety of dialects. To teacher Natalio Hernández we owe the following books, among others, in which his poetry is collected: *Xochicoscatl* "Flower Necklace" (Editorial Capulli, 1985) and *Sempoalxochitl* "Twenty Flower" (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1988). His creations have circulated also in newspapers and journals, including *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* from the National Autonomous University, and *Caravelle*, University of Toulouse. The acute sensibility to which his poems give testimony, as well as the intensity with which he often affirms the affection and pride he feels for his culture, have awakened a vital interest and appreciation in his ever-expanding circle of readers. We should add that Natalio Hernández has performed readings of his work in indigenous communities as well as in cultural salons, among them the National Museum of Anthropology.

Delfino Hernández Hernández, brother of Natalio, was also born in Ixhuatlán de Madero, Veracruz. He also earned the title of Normal Teacher and has followed a career parallel to that of Natalio. In addition to having worked for the Secretary of Public Education, teacher Delfino Hernández gives classes in Nahuatl at cultural centers sponsored by the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes throughout Mexico. (As a student in the Seminar of Nahuatl Culture of the National Autonomous University, he has approached the under-

standing of Nahuatl literature, in its classical form, with attention and zeal.) In his poetry and narratives, both exhibiting deep sentiment and a magisterial style, he stands out as one of the most distinguished creators of contemporary Nahuatl literature. His work has won him honors in a variety of literary competitions. Through the circulation of this work in newspapers and journals, including *Estudios de Cultural Náhuatl*, as well as through readings he has given in various places, he has become one of the most widely recognized of all authors who write in Nahuatl. We also owe to him several grammatical works, some for use in primary schools and others for advanced students of the language.

A native of Xalitla, in the state of Guerrero, Alfredo Ramírez, who holds a master's in ethnology from the National School of Anthropology and History, dedicates a part of his time to poetry. In his productions, where one feels the beat of inspiration from the ancient songmakers, the *cuicapicqueh*, feelings, images, and ideas flourish, reflections of his own ambiance and way of life. In comparison to other contemporary poets for whom Nahuatl is the maternal tongue, the poetry of Alfredo Ramírez conveys what one might call a more personal tone. No small number of his compositions are songs of sadness, modern *icnocuicatl*, "orphan songs," new jades that prove that the capacity for original literature endures even today in the cultural world of the Nahuas. Alfredo Ramírez, a former member of the Seminar of Nahuatl Culture, has published various of his works in *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* and in other journals and papers.

Many will be surprised to learn that, in addition to these three conspicuous contemporary Nahuatl poets, there are others—not a few—who are beginning to be recognized. I refer not to the well-known and already recognized masters of Nahuatl writing such as Librado Silva Galeana and Carlos López Avila, natives of Santa Ana Tlacotenco in the Federal District and known especially for their narratives, but to various others also from the Huastec region of Veracruz. I will limit my mention here to a small anthology titled *Xochitlajlolkoskatl: Poesía Náhuatl Contemporánea*, compiled by Joel Martínez Hernández, a teacher, and published by the Autonomous University of Tlaxcala in 1987. From its riches of nearly one hundred poems, I offer below a small sample. Looking upon such a rich stream, which grows by the day, one can only think of the prophetic words of that prehispanic songmaker who said, "My songs shall not cease, nor my flowers die; singer, I raise them up."

Of the new treasure of "flowers and songs" in Nahuatl those presented here in the original language and translation are only a sample. The history of modern Nahuatl literature and its rich universe of poetic expression awaits further study.

Enrique Villamil

Castilteca in Tenochtitlán Ihuān Tlācoltīca Yohualli

Cuahtemoc in aztecatl,
Telpochtli yolchicactic,

Tlatelolco Tlacatecatl,
Ca itlaquen pehpetlactic.

Ihecuac Cortes oacico,
Altepepa Tenochtitla,
Mexihca oquinchanhuice,
Moctezuma tzacualtitla.

Huan ocachtin tlacateca,
Teilpiloyan oquintlali,
Cuauhtemoc ihuan azteca,
Iciuhqui oquincenlali.

Man Cortes otlamihmicti,
In teopa Huitzilopochtli,
Cenca oquitlahuelmichti,
In yochicahuac telpochtli.

Oyec ompa in choquiztli,
Huei in yeztli ototocac,
Pampa open yaohuiliztli,
Huan yehua omocenmacac.

Man Cortes ocholohuaya,
Ca Popotla nahualtica,
Huan tlaxcalteca oyaya,
Oquinchiato nahualtica.

Ompa miac oquinmihmictihque,
Caxtilteca huan tlaxcalteca,
Cortes oquimohcamictihque,
Huan ocachtin itlacateca.

Ahuehuetontli itzintla,
Campa Cortes in chocac,
Huan mimique tlatzintla,
Tlapal yeztli ototocac.

Nochi tlen oquiuhicaya,
In chalchihuitl in Mexihco,
Iman in oquintocaya,
Oquicathque Mexihco.

Ica iyolo in cocoltic,
Cuauhtemoc in yaohtic,
Iyezmihmil oquipalehui,
Huan ihquion omoyolcehui.

The Spaniards in Tenochtitlan and the Night of Sadness¹

Cuauhtemoc² the grand Aztec,
 young man of warrior spirit,
 Lord of Tlatelolco³
 splendidly arrayed.

When Cortés arrived here
 at the city of Tenochtitlan,
 he seized the Mexica homes
 and imprisoned Moteuczoma.

And other warriors also
 he imprisoned as well:
 Cuauhtemoc and the Aztecs
 quickly assembled.

When Cortes led a slaughter
 on the temple of Huitzilopochtli,
 great anger rose up
 in the valiant young man.

On the battleground
 blood was scattered and sown;
 commotion sounds
 and they surrendered themselves.

When Cortés escaped
 with all his Tlaxcalans
 to Popotla by night,
 they fell on him furiously.

Spaniards, Tlaxcalans
 there they killed many,
 terrified Cortés
 and all the Spanish lords.

Under the ahuehuete tree
 there Cortés wept,
 seeing the dead laid out
 and so much blood running.

So much fine Mexican
 jade they carried,
 but pursuing them without quarter
 the Mexica recovered it all.

For strong was his heart
 Cuauhtemoc, the warrior;
 his race he sustained
 and his people he pacified.

Pedro Barra y Valenzuela**In Huitzitzillin**

Xochitic molinia ce chalchiujoyoli:
quilcajtoc huitzitzili ihuehue tapazoli.

The Hummingbird

In and out of the flower flits
a living emerald;
the hummingbird forgets its old nest.⁴

In Ocotl

Ixtlahuatl quipotonia,
tlapechtzotzoltic techmaca
tla itzoncal mocelia.

Cente cihuatl tlapapaca
ocotla itzintla, [Zen cualli]
Itonalcuica temaca
ipan iteno ameyalli.

The Pine

The fields fill with fragrance,
it gives us soft beds
when its hair renews.

A woman washing, washing
under the pines—so good;
she gives away her day-song
on the bank of the spring.

In Cacalotl

Ehecaticpac tzahtzi ica cualantli,
quipolotoc iozto
ipan yayactic tepetl ixilantli

The Crow

On the wind he squawks with irritation;
can't find his cave
in the mountain's grey belly.

In Zolli

Zacaitic nehneni, nel mahmahui,
 xinachtli tlapepena pan tlazolli
 Huihhuitoni, tlehco, quen tlahuitolli,
 huan ichoquiliz, pan ehecatl quiahui

The Quail

Through grass it goes, full of fright,
 picking out seeds among the garbage.
 It starts, it rises arrow-like
 and its chirring on the wind rains.

Santos Acevedo López**Ixtelotli Capollin**

No nic itoa quenin mo ixtelotli
 Huelittiliz ome capolme,
 qui no huelittaliz amaxocotl,
 yohualli ihuan huel cemixquic tlampil huiloni,
 ¡Amo mo no nitla xoloxoatzintl,
 mo nitla tlapochiua, tetch acyohuac!

¡Ihuan quenin notiahui qui nitla chihua,
 ihuan quenin tiahui nitla neltoca:
 nelnozo manel ce nitla cuepa,
 no nitenamiqui ocequi cihuatl! . . .

Moztla yquac tlahuizcalehua
 mo nite chia tetzalan nopalín
 ihuan nepa mo nicté ma no quiteotl
 quenin no tiahui iníc Nogales
 zanyé oncan nitla nitla tehuatza caztila hemilli
 qui nahui yeica macuilli tomin.

Eyes of Cherry

They tell me your eyes
 are like two cherries,
 or like blackberries
 in the night and any other hour;
 Don't you scowl, little thing,
 I'll carry you off in the morning!

And what do you know, what do you do,
 and what do you think—

just as I turn and spin around
here's another lady before me!

Tomorrow at dawn
I'll wait for you in the nopales
and give you my farewell;
I'm off to Nogales, where
the toasted beans go
at four for five reales.⁵

Natalio Hernández Hernández

Nomaseualchinanko

Axkemaj nimistsilkauas nomaseualchinanko
nochipa nimitsijlamikis ika noyolo
nimits tokajtis ika nomaseualtlajtol
"Tlaltolontipaj" ijkinoj momaseualtokaj.

Noyolo mokesoua kemaj nitlajlamiki
kemaj nikijlamiki kalpolmej tlen onkayaya:
Tsapoyo, Reyistaj, Tlapani uan Mankojoyoj
tlen totatauj ijkinoj tlatokajtlalijtejkej.

Axkemaj nikilkauas kampa san noikxipaj ninemiaya
kuaojmej kampa nionkuajkuaiyaya,
ojmej kampa niouiyaya mila,
ueyojmej Kampa niouiyaya niontiansoua.

Kuali nikijlamiki kenijki nimopapaleuiaya
Inuiaya sekinok telpokatlakamej,
ipan se tonatlj se ueyi mili tijmeuayayaj
ika miak pakililistli titokayayaj,
ika miak pakililistli tokistlakuali tijmaseuiyayaj.

Melauak yejyeksij kenijki nimoskaltijtiakl
papamej ika kualkaj nex ixitikoj,
akuajtajmej ika tiotlak nechkuikatikoj,
kayochi ika tiotlak nech majmatiko,
sakamistli nojkia ika tiotlak piomajmatiko
uan kemaya pioichtekiko.

Ika miak pakilistli nikintlachiliaya
xochimej tlen mojmostla ual kueponiaya
chimalxochitl tlen iuaya tonatij ual kauaniaya;
tlatokxochitl, kuetlaxxochitl, xiloxochitl,
teokuitlaxochitl, oloxochitl, sempoalxochitl
uan miak sekinok xochimej nikinjamiki,
tlen onkaj hasta kenamaj ipan nomaseualchinako.

My Native Town

I'll never forget you, my native pueblo,
always my heart will remember you.
I will liberate you in my Indian voice,
"Tlaltolontipa"⁶ I will call you.

My heart saddens with the memories
when I imagine again the barrios that were:
Tsapoyo, Reyistla, Tlapani, el Mangal—
*calpullis*⁷ founded by our grandfathers.⁸

I will never forget walking barefoot
two miles to bring firewood,
two to go to the fields,
long miles to the market.

Remembering well how I assisted in the labor brigades
together with other young men;
In one day we could clear a large field,
and with great delight we planted,
with the same delight we shared the crops.

The truth is I grew in rectitude and grace.
Toucans woke me early,
the *akuajtajmej* sang to me in the afternoon;
the *kayochi* came in the afternoon to scare me,
the *sakamistli* also came in the afternoon
to frighten the hens
and sometimes stole them away.

With great contentment I observed
the flowers that bloomed day by day;
the *chimalxochitl*⁹ that turned with the sun,
tlatocxochitl, cuetlaxxochitl, xiloxochitl,
teocuitlaxochitl, oloxochitl, cempoulxochitl
and many other flowers I remember now,
which even today still adorn my native town.

Delfino Hernández Hernández

Kauitl Ixayak

Yaluaya nimoitak ipan teskatl
kauitl kiijtłakojtok.
uajka mokajki telpokayotl.
Yolik ixmiktiajkej se uan se
nochi xochitl tlen ipan noyolo kueponiyayaj.
¿Nelia ueuekisa ni kauitl?

Amo, amo neli. Kautl amo pano.
 Tojuantij kena ax ouij tipanoj.
 Tlaj tijneki tikitas ken tipanoj ipan kautl,
 xijpoua kexpa tepejtok xiuitl,
 xijpoua kexpa monextijtok sitlalkueyitl eluikak,
 kexpa istak astamej panotokej eluikak,
 kitemouaj kanij momanauisej ipan sekuistlaj,
 ouamili san kej ipa yaluaya uan namaj,
 onkaj tlapatskilistli.
 Yese ayok tlen tlamantli mokaua kej ipa.
 Ichpokamej ueuiyak intsonkal tlen nech nauajkej
 kemaj nipili nieliyaya, namaj nojkia tlaiskaltijkejya.
 Ontlanesi, ontlanesi, sekinok tlakamej ualouij totepotsko,
 nochi moyauloua uan teipaj nochi moixpatla.

Time's Face¹⁰

Yesterday I looked in the mirror,
 time has destroyed it,
 my youth lies far off.
 Slowly they lost their faces,
 the flowers that bloomed from my heart.
 Is it true that time grows old?
 No, no, not true. Time doesn't pass;
 We are the ones who pass through time.
 If you wish to observe our passing
 count the falls of leaves
 count the appearances of *Sitlalkueyitl*, the star
 count the passages of white cranes searching
 across the winter sky for shelter.
 The canebreaks look the same, but
 nothing is the same.
 The girls in heavy braids who once carried me
 as a child already have their own fresh plants.
 The sun rises and rises again; other beings
 appear walking behind us.
 Everything turns, and turning, all faces change.

Alfredo Ramirez

Zan Ce' Otl'

Nocnihtzin,
 ¿tlin topan nochia?
 xniau, nanunca
 uan xniaznequi',

quemantica'
 caznonyatiaz.
 ¿Quemanon?
 xnicmati'.
 Amantzin
 niau, ninenemi' uan ninenemi'
 ipan ce' otlí' ueyac uan patlauac.
 ¿uan tla quemantica' nipoliui' quen teua'
 ipan un otlí' ueyac uan patlauac?.
 iuan tlaquemantica' tinechelnamiqui'
 xnechtetemo' umpa niez.
 Umpa nimitzchixtoz
 xniaz umpa ninemiz.
 Cuac teua' taziz campa ninemiz.
 umpa timoyecnotzazque
 campa neua' nitlayocoxtinemiz.

Only One Road

Friend,
 What happens with us?
 I'm not moving, I'm here
 and don't desire to move.
 But one day
 perhaps I'll be going somewhere.
 When?
 I don't know.
 Right now.
 I go, walking and walking along
 on a broad and long road.
 And suppose one day I get lost
 like you, on this broad, long road—
 and if one day you think of me,
 look for me, I'll be there.
 I'll be there waiting for you;¹¹
 I won't leave, I'll be walking around.
 When you arrive where I'll be walking,
 there will be clean conversation between us,
 there, where I'll be waiting in imagination.

Joel Martínez Hernández

¿Keski Nauamaseualme Tiltstoke?

Seki koyomej kiijtoua
 timaseualmej tipoliuijej

timaseualmej titlamisej
 totlajtlot ayokkana mokakis
 totlajtlot ayokkana motekiuis
 koyomej ika yolpakij
 koyome ni tlamantli kitemojtokej.
 ¿Kenke, tle ipampa,
 kitemojtokej matipoliuikan?
 Ax moneki miak tiknemilisej
 se tsontli xiuitl techmachte
 tlen kineki koyotl.
 Koyotl kieleuia totlal
 kieleuia tokuatitla
 kieleuia toateno
 kieleuia tosiuulis
 kieleuia toitonalis.
 Koyotl kineki matinemikan
 uejueyi altepetl itempan
 nupeka matixijxipetsnemikan
 nupeka matiapismikikan
 nupeka matokamokajkayauakan
 nupeka matokamauiltikan.
 Koyotl kineki matimochiuakan tiitlakeuahuan.
 Yeka kineki matikauakan
 tokomontlal
 tokomonteki
 tomaseualteki
 tomaseualtlajtlot
 yeka kineki matikilkauakan
 tomaseualtlaken
 tomaseualnemilis
 tomaseuallnamikilis.
 Koyotl achto techkoyokuepa
 uan teipa techtlachtekilia
 nochi tlen touaxka
 nochi tlen titlaeliltia
 nochi tlen mila tlaelli
 kichteki tosiuulis
 kichteki totekipanolis.
 ¿Tlen kichiuas maseualli?
 ¿Monenkauasej?
 Moneki se ome tlajtolti
 tiktlalisej pan toyolo
 timoyolilusej
 tiixpitlanisej
 tonejmachpan tinemise.
 Miak pamitl tekittl tikixnamikisej

aman axkan san se pillajtolli tikijtosej
 sen kamatl inmonakastitlan tikaxiltisej.
 ¿Kanke uan keski timaseualmej
 tiitstokej pan ni Mexko tlalli?
 Tojuanti tinauamaseualmej
 axkana san sejko, amo san sikan, tiitstokej
 tixitintokej, titepejtokej
 pan kaxtolli uan se Estados
 tiitstokej pan ontsontli uan chikueye altepeme
 Yeka moneki tikkuamachilisej
 axkana san tochinanko
 axkana san toaltepeko tiitstokej
 tojuanti tinauamaseualmej
 nouiyan Mexko tlalli tiitstokej.
 Kemantika tikitaj tikakij
 timaseualmej titlamijtokej
 tla tikitaj tlakapoualis ni tikitasej:
 pan 1895 xiuitl tiitstoyaj 659,650
 pan 1910 xiuitl tiitstoyaj 516,410
 pan 1930 xiuitl tiitstoyaj 664,293
 pan 1960 xiuitl tiitstoyaj 842,239
 pan 1970 xiuitl tiitstoyaj 935,290
 ok tikitasej keski tiitstokej pan 1980 xiuitl.
 Yeka kuali tikijtosej
 mejkatsa kinekiskia matipoliuikan
 nauamaseualmej axkana tipoliuij
 nauamaseualmej timomiakiliijtokej.

How Many Native Nahuas Are We?

Various "coyotes"¹² (not native) have said
 that we native people will disappear,
 we native people will be extinguished,
 that our words will no longer be heard,
 our words will no longer be in use.
 The heart of a coyote delights in this,
 the coyotes pursue this goal.
 Why, and for what cause
 should they desire our disappearance?
 It doesn't require much pondering;
 Four hundred years have taught us
 what the coyote wants:
 Coyote covets our land,
 covets our forests,
 covets our rivers,
 wants our exhaustion,

wants our life-sweat.
 Coyote wants us to live
 in the margins of great cities
 and to live there naked,
 to die there of hunger,
 to be made the token of his manipulations,
 and to be made the butt of his jokes.
 Coyote wants to make us over into his wage laborers.
 For this he wants us to abandon
 our common lands,
 our common labors,
 our native labor,
 our native language.
 For this he wants us to forget
 our native dress
 our native mode of life
 our native mode of thought.
 First Coyote transforms us to coyotes
 and then robs us
 of everything that is ours:
 of everything we produce,
 of everything the fields produce;
 he steals our weariness,
 he steals our work.
 What is a native man to do?
 surrender himself without a fight?
 It requires that we place
 a few words in our hearts,
 that we speak to ourselves,
 that we let the light fill our faces,
 that we live in consciousness.
 We must confront many tasks;
 for now we say only one noble word,
 we fit a phrase for your ears.
 Where, how many native people are we
 living here in the lands of Mexico?
 We Nahua people are not found
 in one place, we are dispersed,
 we are scattered in sixteen states
 in eight-hundred-and-eight towns.
 And so we must recognize
 that we exist not only in our hamlet,
 not only in our own town;
 we Nahua people live throughout all
 the lands of Mexico.
 Sometimes we hear or we see

that we native people are diminishing;
 but if we observe the census we see:
 In the year 1895 we were 659,650
 in the year 1910 we were 516,410
 in the year 1930 we were 664,293
 in the year 1960 we were 842,239
 in the year 1970 we were 935,290
 and we shall see how many we are in 1980.
 So we can say confidently,
 even though they wanted us to disappear
 we Nahua people are not disappearing,
 we Nahua people are flourishing.

NOTES

1. This song is written in the traditional ballad meter of the *corrido*.
2. The last native ruler of Tenochtitlan, who at age eighteen inherited the last desperate defense of the city against Cortés when his uncle, Cuicahuac, died of smallpox. He would not surrender or even meet with Cortés and was captured on the lake attempting to flee when the entire city had been flattened around the last defenders. Coming before Cortés, he handed him his dagger and said, "Here, now kill me."
3. Site of the final defense of the city.
4. This haiku-like piece is reminiscent of Emily Dickinson's description of the hummingbird in #1463: "A Route of Evanescence / With a revolving wheel— / A Resonance of Emerald— / A Rush of Cochineal . . ."
5. One-eighth of a peso.
6. "Round-swelling Land," which carries implications of fertility and beauty.
7. Ancient Nahuatl name for the ethnic/religious/clan neighborhoods of which the Nahua cities were composed in pre-Columbian times.
8. Perhaps truer than even the poet knows; modern names of barrio neighborhoods in several villages in the state of Puebla have been identified in early sixteenth-century native land record codexes for those villages—records far more precise and carefully measured, by the way, than anything created by contemporary Spanish surveyors.
9. Sunflower; lit. "shield flower"
10. Reminiscent of Yeats's "Wild Swans at Coole."
11. Whitman, "Song of Myself," section 52: "I stop somewhere, waiting for you."
12. This Mexican "coyote" is quite different from the trickster of western U.S. stories and has his own tradition.